



## **NEW CONSULTATION TO IDENTIFY ANTIBIOTIC MEASURES IN BEEF HERDS**

A new consultation aimed at farmers, vets, advisors and all other stakeholders in the beef supply chain has been launched to determine the best way of measuring and comparing antibiotic use in UK beef herds.

The consultation, issued by the Antimicrobial Use sub-group within the Cattle Health and Welfare Group (CHAWG), aims to identify a common set of measures for UK beef farms. These will allow farms to understand their antibiotic use, and how this is changing over time and relative to the whole industry.

In turn, this will help guide vet-farmer discussions around responsible antibiotic use and help the beef sector meet its current and future antibiotic use targets, identified through [RUMA's Targets Taskforce](#).

Once agreed, these measures, or 'metrics', will also be incorporated in the electronic Medicines Book for Cattle and Sheep, which is currently under development. Similar [metrics for the dairy sector](#) were consulted on, agreed and announced last year.

Chair of CHAWG Tim Brigstocke says the beef metrics have taken longer to define because of the complexity created by a wide array of production systems and numerous movements on and off farms.

"While there is a method in place to report national antibiotic use of beef herds using the Population Correction Unit (PCU) developed by European regulators, it's not suitable to use this for comparison at farm level because of its focus on measuring antibiotic use against the number of slaughter animals," explains Mr Brigstocke.

"In the UK, many beef farms do not produce slaughter animals, or they produce so few that this number does not fairly represent their production system. The aim is to identify metrics that provide a sensible balance between accuracy and pragmatism, that work for the majority of farms, and – most importantly – give producers and their vets the feedback they need to make improvements in responsible medicine use while protecting cattle health and welfare."

Within the consultation, it has been recommended that figures are calculated for both total antibiotic use, and use of highest-priority Critically Important Antibiotics (HP-

CIAs). This is because a reduction in total antibiotics used must not be achieved through a shift towards use of HP-CIAs, which often require lower doses.

“In an effort to come up with the most practical system, four options have been proposed,” says Mr Brigstocke.

“Two of these are different ways of defining a ‘Standard Beef Cattle Unit’ or SBCU, which is a weight-based measure. Then a further two options are animal-based measures, examining both the percentage of animals treated, and the treatment days per animal.

“We really want to hear from as many beef farmers and vets who work with beef herds as possible, so we can understand which measures would be most useful for them and the easiest to provide the data for.

“The cattle industry has responded proactively to very legitimate concerns about antibiotic resistance, and we have seen a rapid fall in the use of HP-CIAs through the strong support of Red Tractor among others. This is about taking the next step.”

The consultation will be open until 23 August, and can be found on CHAWG web pages at [www.chawg.org.uk](http://www.chawg.org.uk). All feedback should be submitted to [info@chawg.org.uk](mailto:info@chawg.org.uk). A webinar held on 18 August is also available to view on the website; it contains an overview of the different proposals as well as answers to some common questions.

While the common metrics will be used for reporting, it will still be possible to use other antibiotic use metrics according to individual requirements and needs.

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Issued 26 July 2019

### **Notes to editors**

CHAWG is an independent group comprising government, supply industry, farming, veterinary and animal welfare representatives, that meets to collaboratively address relevant cattle health and welfare issues.

Metrics agreed for the dairy sector last year can be found at [www.chawg.org.uk](http://www.chawg.org.uk).

More information is available about the work of RUMA's Targets Task Force at <https://www.ruma.org.uk/targets-task-force/>.